

“Seeking a Non-Anxious Presence” ©
Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
August 27, 2017

As we enter this sacred space together in fellowship and holiness, please turn off your electronic devices and respect others' need for silent reflection.

Gathering Music *Oltremare*, Einaudi Emily Phillips

Sounding of the Gong

#Welcome Dan Brill, President
Board of Trustees

Prelude *Rose*, Einaudi

Chalice Lighting & Bell Rev. Lloyd
(The flaming chalice is the symbol of our free faith)

Opening Words

Blessing for a New Home, by John O'Donohue¹

“May this house shelter your life,

When you come . . . home here,

May all of the weight of the world fall from your shoulders.

May your heart be tranquil here, blessed by peace the world cannot give . . .

May nothing destructive ever cross your threshold.

May this be a safe place full of understanding and acceptance,

Where you can be as you are,

Without the need of any mask or pretense or image.

May this home be a place of discovery, where the possibilities that sleep

¹ <http://www.pegorama.com/2008/04/10/blessing-for-a-new-home/> August 26, 2017

in the clay of your soul can emerge to deepen and refine your vision . . .

May it be a house of courage, where healing and growth are loved, where dignity and forgiveness prevail;

A home where patience of spirit is prized, and the sight of the destination is never lost

[though] the journey be difficult and slow.

May there be great delight [here].

May it be a house of welcome for the broken and diminished.

May you have the eyes to see that no visitor arrives without a gift

and no guest leaves without a blessing."

May it be so.

A Story for All Amber's Rella's Late Night Safe Space (Seth Meyers)

#*Opening Hymn #4 *I Brought My Spirit to the Sea*

Reflection *Seeking a Non-Anxious Presence*

Rev. Lloyd

Imagine a time when things were rapidly changing in ways you didn't understand. When life seemed or seems more chaotic than it did before and when the old ways of doing things (that seemed to work in the past), aren't working, or have been abandoned. They are times that might lead you to wonder who's in charge . . . or . . . whether anyone is in charge . . . or . . . if G*d² has left the building? You might feel a profound sense of loss of control and with that, a loss of security and confidence in your ability to plan for the good things in life. And, all that . . . might lead to feeling more anxious and troubled than you have ever felt before.

² Rev. Lloyd does not spell out the word, "G*d," because the term is loaded with many misconceptions and preconceptions. That which is the spirit of life and community, the spirit of love and death, the spirit of humanity, cannot be relegated to one three letter word. Rev. Lloyd invites others to reconsider the meanings of this word, and, to contemplate whether it is a noun or verb. Is G*d Love? The reader is invited to expand their vision and understanding . . .

If you were living in the times of the Hebrew Bible, you might offer up a lamentation. You might say as the prophet Jeremiah once said after the fall of the First Temple,

“7 [Though Jerusalem’s people have fallen at the hands of an adversary, she remembers,] in the days of her affliction and . . . anguish[,] all her treasures that she had from the days of old . . .” “[Now] . . . her inhabitants sigh as they search for bread; they have bartered their treasures for food, to keep themselves alive . . .”³ “For these things do I weep, my eyes flow with tears: Far from me is any comforter who might revive my spirit . . .”⁴ (Book of Lamentations)

PAUSE

Can you feel Jeremiah’s anxiety and anguish? The emotions he expresses in words are only a symptom of deeper, truer emotions and questions. Underneath Jeremiah’s anguish he is really asking: “Why did God [(who had once been Israel’s redeemer), consent] to the destruction of His holy city and temple? Why is God’s love no longer evident?”⁵ Mind you, he does “not [argue] with God, or accuse Him of injustice, so much as [he begs] for His mercy.”⁶ He ends his lamentation, pleading, “Return us to You, O God, and we will return[.]”⁷

Within this ancient lamentation cry exists the ancient desire, request, and need for a presence that is calming, nurturing, and empowering. Jeremiah asks for a persuasive force that instead of creating calamity and chaos, sets the stage for wholesome innovation and cooperative peace among the people. He asks for a certain kind of presence, the kind of presence that we, in the 21st century, would call a non-anxious presence. One that is not highly reactive, emotionally chaotic or egocentric. He asks for a G*d that steps beyond its own primitive emotional needs to partner with humanity to create a safe space for all to thrive. He asks for the kind of relationship with G*d where you can say with confidence, faith and a quietness of mind:

*“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness . . .*

³ <https://www.sefaria.org/Lamentations.1.16-17?lang=en> August 26, 2017

⁴ <https://www.sefaria.org/Lamentations.1.16-17?lang=en> August 26, 2017

⁵ <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/lamentations/> August 26, 2017

⁶ <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/lamentations/> August 26, 2017

⁷ <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/lamentations/> August 26, 2017

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table . . . thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth
over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell
in the house of the Lord forever."*

— *Psalm 23:1-6*

PAUSE

In the Christian Bible, Matthew (6:28-30) and Luke (12:26-27) tell the story where Jesus says to his disciples,

"25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to [your] lifespan? b 26 So if you cannot do such a small thing, why do you worry about the rest? 27 Consider how the lilies grow: They do not labor or spin. c Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was adorned like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and [gone] tomorrow, how much more will He clothe you . . . 32 Do not be afraid . . .

The whole of the Christian tradition relies on one's faith in the teachings of Jesus. Faith that Jesus was real and that his teachings are relevant to these times, to our lives. Faith that giving over control of one's worries and anxieties to Jesus and G*d allows one to let go of the distracting worries of our lives and to focus on following the teachings of Jesus. Faith in the belief that what is important is that we be a compassionate and loving presence to others. It is by this faith that Christians find a non-anxious presence in their lives. It allows for the capacity to relinquish their worries and concerns to a higher power. I suspect many of you know people who have claimed Jesus and his teachings as a foundation for their lives. And, I suspect many of you have been amazed, at times, to see how the strength of that faith allows them to cope effectively with tragedy and chaos.

PAUSE

In between the times of Jeremiah and Jesus lived another person. About 500 years before Jesus walked this earth the Buddha sought another way to come to terms with and cope with life's sufferings. He left his family and embarked on a journey where he first tried and then rejected several theologies that had, up 'til then, maintained a worldly and after-world caste system that kept people stuck in a cycle of suffering.

Through trial and error and deep reflection, the Buddha discovered that we can control the degree of suffering that we and others experience by controlling our own minds and how we react to our own thoughts.

It is said that he said,

"Believe nothing, no matter where you read it or who has said it, not even if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense." ("Believe nothing . . . unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.")

The Buddha trusts each person's conscious and capacity to discern for themselves the order of the universe and what makes sense. He does not identify himself as a God to be worshipped. He does not even assume the role of a charismatic leader upon whom others should become dependent.

He turns the practice of control over one's mind and thoughts back to the owner, the person, you.

It is also said that he said,

"nothing can harm you as much as your own thoughts . . . unguarded." ". . . [T]hought manifests as the word; the word manifests as the deed; the deed develops into habit; and habit hardens into character. So watch the thought and its ways with care, and let it spring from love born out of concern for all beings."

("Nothing can harm you as much as your own thoughts . . . unguarded.")

In our times, the Buddhist disciple and Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh has said,

"Our true home is the present moment. If we really live in the moment, our worries and hardships will disappear and we will discover life with all its miracles"⁸ "[But] if, in our heart, we still cling to anything – anger, anxiety or possessions – we cannot be free. Letting go gives us freedom and freedom is the only condition for happiness." "All the wonderful things that you are looking for—happiness, peace, and joy—can be found inside of you. You do not need to look anywhere else."⁹

How do we learn to control our own mind? "[Buddhism's] key teaching is that, through [mindful meditation], we can learn to live happily in the present moment— [and that it

⁸ <https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/> August 26, 2017

⁹ <https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/> August 26, 2017

is] the only way to truly develop peace, both in one's self and in the world."¹⁰ (Emphasis added.) It is a way to be present to the moment, a way to name the anxieties that distract you, a way to reflect on the real issues that lay beneath surface emotions of anxiety and suffering that too often control our primitive brain and our reactions to the world. By this practice those who follow the Buddhist tradition seek a non-anxious presence of calm and security within themselves.

PAUSE

In our own way, as Unitarian Universalists, we also try to focus on this world, this present. We try to focus on living compassionately now, with each other. We try to bring out the best in one another. We seek to be the non-anxious presence others need in order to be their best selves.

But, it's hard sometimes, isn't it? We live in a time of confusion and chaos. Some of us may be feeling more anxious and insecure than we have ever felt before. Take a moment to consider that this feeling is not new and is ever present to all those who have been pushed to the margins of our society. The feelings of anxiety and insecurity, of worry and loss, are feelings others have felt and still feel every day of their lives. Collectively, we have a responsibility to name the anxieties that distract us, and a more significant duty to one another to collectively seek a deeper change in how we shape our thoughts, our words, our deeds, our habits, and ultimately our character.

One essential way to do so, is to make sure that occasionally, we take a break from the worry, anxiety and yes, action, to reflect deeply and listen mindfully to our own inner thoughts. We all need a safe space where we can do that deep reflection in order that we may once again act compassionately in the world. When we try to live faithfully by our covenant with each other, we can be the safe space each of us needs to do the hard work of naming the anxieties that seek to control us, and then, more importantly, to discover the real issues that lay beneath the surface.

We all need a safe place to ground ourselves, to recharge our batteries, to heal. Ideally, it will be a place that inspires you with the objects, teachings and memories that call you to your best self. One where you can go when you are struggling, one that helps you refocus on the values that nurture your soul, one that feeds you such that your cup runneth over . . . so that you can then nurture the souls of others.

Many seek a non-anxious presence "out there", in someone or something beyond themselves. We do so as well when we call upon a Spirit of Life and Love. But, it's also important to seek that non-anxious presence in ourselves. We are the ones living on

¹⁰ <https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/biography/> August 26, 2017

this earth. It's fate and our neighbor's fate are our responsibility. Though we may seek to be a non-anxious presence to our inner selves, it is also important to be a non-anxious presence of calm, listening and support, to those seeking peace in our midst. The more we can be that kind of presence, the more others will thrive, and the more closely we will come to making peace in our minds, and in our world.

By our deep reflection, may we come to know ourselves, gather strength for the journey, and allow our hearts to break open wide so that we may be present to ourselves and each other.

May it be so.

Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows

And, now, if you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

Please come forward to the lectern as you are able. Or, we will bring a mic to you, as needed.

PAUSE

Let us reflect with reverence in our hearts for the joys and sorrows spoken and unspoken today.

A Time of Personal Reflection

In the coming moments, I ask that you reflect on what is worrying you or leading you to feel anxious in these times. Please write it down on the index card. And, then . . . close your eyes and reflect . . . what is under that feeling? Is it fear? Fear about what? Is it another emotion? If so, what is that emotion really about? The answer may not arise in this time and space . . . but carry these questions forward into the journey of your life and they will arise.

#1009: *When I Breathe In . . .*

Prayer: Excerpt from “For the Traveler by John O’Donahue”¹¹

A journey can become a sacred thing:

Make sure, before you go,

¹¹ O’Donahue, John. **To Bless the Space Between Us** (New York: Doubleday, 2008) 54.

*To take the time
To bless your going forth,
To free your heart of ballast
So that the compass of your soul
Might direct you toward
The territories of spirit where you will discover more of your hidden life,
And, the urgencies that deserve to claim you.
May you travel in an awakened way,
Gathered wisely into your inner ground;
[May] you may not waste the invitations which wait along the way to transform
you.*

Sung Meditation

Love, Once Again, Break Our Hearts Open Wide

by Rev. Jason Shelton

Offertory Words

Blessing for Work by John O'Donahue¹²

*"May dawn find hope in your heart, approaching [each] new day with dreams,
possibilities, and promises.*

May evening find you gracious and fulfilled.

May you go into the night blessed, sheltered, and protected.

May your soul calm, console, and renew you."

For these things and more, we ask your blessing on this congregation and the offering of your time, treasure and talent.

Offering & Offertory Music *Andare*, Einaudi

Closing Hymn #123 *Spirit of Life (2x)*

***Closing Words**

Rev. Lloyd

¹² O'Donahue, John. **To Bless the Space Between Us** (New York: Doubleday, 2008) 146.

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Extinguishing the Chalice

Sounding of the Gong

Announcements

Dan Brill, President
Board of Trustees